

Knowledge for Sale: Norwegian Encyclopaedias in the Marketplace

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Abstract

Encyclopedias present and contain knowledge, but historically they have also been commercial commodities, produced for sale. In this article, we study the self-presentations of a selection of Norwegian encyclopedias, as these are expressed in the form of commercial images, advertising texts and slogans. We thus present a brief but detailed study of what might be called a number of paratextual matters associated with 20th-century Norwegian encyclopedias, with the aim of identifying the most significant or recurring topoi in the material. Our analysis shows that claims about speed and modernization are among the most conspicuous ingredients in these self-presentations, claims which, we argue, feed into a particular logic of a particular version of 20th-century modernity. The article begins with an analysis of the commercially successful *Konversationslexikon*, the first Norwegian encyclopedia, published in 1906 and for a long time market leader of the bourgeois tradition. The *Konversationslexikon* was produced with the explicit aim of providing a source of conversation for the educated classes, a new and expanding group of readers. We also show how the publisher Aschehoug went on to strengthen its own position in this market through a sophisticated process of differentiation. Seen as a contrast to these market leaders, we explore the Norwegian tradition of counter-encyclopaedias, with the radical *PaxLeksikon* as our main example. This encyclopaedia came into existence as a result of a strong ideological motivation and was run by left-wing idealists. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, it ended up situating itself within the same market mechanisms and the same commercial logic as the bourgeois encyclopaedias. The article ends by a brief consideration of the change from commercial print encyclopaedias to internet-based encyclopaedias, and of the new challenges this poses in a small nation, rhetorically and in the struggle for funding.

Keywords: Encyclopaedia, encyclopaedism, Norway, history, market

Introduction

Encyclopaedias acquired a unique place and exceptional status in Norwegian publishing during the 20th century. Egil and Harald Tveterås, historians of Norwegian booksellers, concluded about their country's publishing industry in the 1970s that encyclopaedias simply became "the kind of books which it was easiest to sell" (Tveterås 1996: 398). For quite some time, the publishers' perspective seems to have been that the market was "insatiable".¹ Our aim in this article is to present a brief but detailed study of what might be called a number of paratextual matters associated with 20th-century Norwegian encyclopaedias. By "paratextual" we refer to Gérard Genette's notion of texts at the threshold of the main text which form "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public" (Genette 1997: 2). Here we are primarily interested in a sub-category of the paratext which Genette terms "the publisher's epitext", in reference to materials, such as advertisements, posters, promotional dossiers and periodical bulletins for booksellers (*ibid.*: 347). More generally, our approach is informed by recent work and theory related to the history of the book, in which Genette's structuralist perspective is supplemented with more historicist and sociological emphases. This kind of approach to texts requires attention not only to the particular physical forms in which a text meets its reader – the manifold functions of its materiality – but also to its various institutional dimensions. Encyclopaedias clearly participate in what Jerome J. McGann calls "The Textual Condition", and one of the dimensions of this "condition" – and of the "socialization" of texts more generally – is their inevitable situatedness as printed matter in a marketplace (McGann 1991: 3-16 and 124-25).² The "physically determinate and socially determined form" in which reading takes place most often has commercial dimensions. As a result, our claim is that we cannot understand the "textuality" of encyclopaedias without paying attention to how they have circulated in the world, including their "modes of production".

The particular paratexts in our corpus are primarily found in the form of commercial images, along with advertising texts and slogans. In studying this material, we have, in addition to consulting publishers' archives, had access to the Norwegian National Library's "Småtrykksamlingen", a collection of smaller print material, including leaflets and all kinds of commercial material intended for booksellers and readers, as well as "Plakatsamlingen", which is an extensive collection of posters.³ Our goal has thus been to investigate and analyze a kind of empirical material that we believe has not yet been adequately explored, either in a Norwegian context or in general. This contribution should be considered a first step, however; it is clear to us that much more work can be done in this area.

In the following, we will study the self-presentation of a few different encyclopaedias, with the aim of identifying their logics and the most significant new or recurring topoi in the material. Our analysis will show that claims about tempo

and modernization are key ingredients in these self-presentations that reveal a particular logic of modernity. This article does not present a complete chronological survey of encyclopaedias in Norway in the 20th century. Instead, we have chosen to analyze the commercially successful “konversasjonsleksikon”, which was the Norwegian market leader of the tradition established by the German publisher Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus. The German genre of the *Konversationslexikon* was produced with the explicit aim of providing a source of conversation for the educated (“gebildete”) classes, a new and expanding group of bourgeois readers (Conrad 2006: 23-66; see also Meyer 1966). We will also show how Aschehoug, the publisher of this leading Norwegian encyclopaedia, went on to strengthen its own position through a process of differentiation.

Seen as a contrast to these market leaders, we will explore the Norwegian tradition of counter-encyclopaedias, with the radical *PaxLeksikon* as our main example. This encyclopaedia came into existence as a result of a strong ideological motivation and was run by idealists. Nevertheless, and perhaps inevitably, it ended up situating itself within the same market for encyclopedic products, within the same commercial logic, as the bourgeois encyclopaedias. Along the way, the publisher Pax managed to produce an impressive repertoire of inventive sales strategies, slogans and commercial material. Towards the end of this article we will touch on developments in the last part of the twentieth century, when the market could no longer uphold the production of encyclopaedias in Norway.

In a more general survey of the large marketing material available to us, we could have chosen to dwell on a number of other recurring rhetorical topoi, such as utility, comprehensiveness or pleasure, to mention but a few. Our reason for focusing on the many claims to novelty, modernity and up-to-datedness is that there seems to be a particular double dynamic at hand in this area. Such claims about encyclopaedias, whether they relate to content or organization, are of course not new. They are at least as old as some of the most famous 18th-century examples of the genre. But this well-established and seemingly necessary claim, a modern and dynamic idea of knowledge, seems, in our material, also to respond to, be involved in and fed by another and more aggressive logic, namely that of the marketplace. Again, we would not want to claim that this dynamic is entirely new, but the 20th-century market, with its increased pace and its strong demands for creating new commodities and customers, seems to have helped this development accelerate. In this way, two demands for newness seem to have fed off and strengthened each other in ways that make the 20th-century encyclopaedia a particularly strong example of the forward thrust in some of the great narratives of modernity. The promotion and branding campaigns for this commodity helped create and affirm the notion of a new kind of age in which knowledge must be continually updated and consumption must increase steadily.

A Counter-encyclopaedia Introduced

It was in the context of this exceptionally strong encyclopedic tradition, one that was dominated by the bourgeois *Konversationslexikon*, that a new encyclopaedia emerged in 1978. In the marketing material for this enterprise, planned as an encyclopaedia in six volumes, a clear diagnosis of the current situation was offered: “Norway does not have too few, but too many encyclopaedias” (“Her kommer Pax Leksikon” 1978). One of the members of the editorial board, the historian Hans Fredrik Dahl, went on to note that there was no other country than his own relatively young nation in which so many encyclopedic works were sold per inhabitant, before posing a challenge: “Is this a gain for our cultural environment?” (“Et opprør i seks bind” 1978). Those behind the new and radical *PaxLeksikon* thought not. While existing encyclopaedias might be useful for those occupied with crossword puzzles, and perhaps for essay writing and self-education through correspondence schools, “An encyclopaedia, a ‘Konversationslexikon’, is a parcel of knowledge aimed at quick consumption and minimal understanding” (ibid.). From such a perspective there was little to separate “our two national encyclopaedias”, Dahl claimed, referring to the multi-volume works by market leaders Aschehoug and Gyldendal. The content was generally the same, even if the number of volumes might vary. *PaxLeksikon*, in opposition to these market leaders, wanted to be “a rebellion in six volumes”, a “counter-encyclopaedia against our great Norwegian heritage” (“Her kommer PaxLeksikon” 1978). The ambition was, as illustration 1 clearly shows, to utilize the potential of the genre in new ways:

We want to present knowledge with understanding. We will use an elementary encyclopedic form in order to say something different, to offer complete knowledge of society, a way into politics, culture, social problems, power structures, a new scheme through and through (ibid.).

PaxLeksikon was different, but also similar; it represented a negation, but also an affirmation of a tradition in a number of ways. This was so in its claims to newness and modernity, but not least in the ways in which it utilized these claims in the launching of a new product.



Ill. 1: This “pyramid of knowledge” is carried by those for whom it is meant: workers in all countries, the so-called “grass-roots” men and women. The road to liberation and a new society went through active acquisition of critical knowledge: through the purchase of PaxLeksikon. The poster is clearly alluding to the satirical image of the “Pyramid of Capitalism”, a well-known image for the political left in the 1960s.

Unknown artist, *Here comes PaxLeksikon*, Pax Forlag: 1978. Brochure A5 format, 14,85x21 cm.

The Main Tradition

Before returning to *PaxLeksikon*, we would like to sketch the history of the strongest line of Norwegian encyclopaedias in the twentieth century, again primarily relying on their commercial self-presentation. The first big Norwegian *Konversationslexikon* came into being as a result of a Danish initiative, namely the publisher Eiler Hagerup. Aschehoug’s William Nygaard agreed to adopt some of the same texts, along with the same pictures and maps, but insisted that the Norwegian edition be introduced as a separate and independent work (Rudeng 1997: 176). Since the 1890s Aschehoug had operated with the motto, “Norwegian books with a Norwegian publisher”, a motto which situated his publications within a national discourse against rival Danish firms publishing Norwegian authors

(Rudeng 1997: 189). The new encyclopaedia, called *Illustreret Norsk Konversationsleksikon* and published in 1906, only a year after the dissolution of the union with Sweden, has been hailed as a “marking of Norway’s new independence” (Tveterås 1996: 194). By 1913 this work numbered six volumes. Nygaard had been very conscious of the importance of marketing the work, and Aschehoug distributed as many as 250 000 invitations for subscription, plus a great number of posters to booksellers and others (ill. 2). This first Norwegian *Konversationslexicon* became a considerable success, selling 20 800 sets (Tveterås 1996: 195).



Ill. 2: Subscriptions wanted for *Illustreret Norsk Konversations-Leksikon*! The poster presents images that became iconic in the Norwegian encyclopaedia tradition: the naked man of Aschehoug, gazing at the stars and “a world of knowledge” – surrounded by columns, like the ancient columns of Hercules, representing the boarders between the known and the unknown world.

Brynjulf Larsson (1881-1920), no title, Aschehoug: 1906. Photo-engraving and letterpress printing, 65 x 50 cm.

With the second edition of 1919 the work's title had changed to *Aschehougs Konversationsleksikon*. It was published in nine volumes and sold more than 50 000 sets. When the fifth edition was issued in 1971, it had been expanded to 20 volumes, with a print run of 140 000 (Tveterås 1996: 196). While the appeal to the national sentiments in a newly independent nation may have been dominant around the time of the first launch of this encyclopaedia, the publisher also, in calling the work "a modern Konversationslexikon", relied on a language that stressed the need to keep up with the times ("En prisregulering" 1931). The marketing of new editions went on to rely much more heavily on this topos, however. In the supplementary volume launched in 1932, itself a symptom of the concern with updatedness and topicality, the advertising held that "One must of course with works like these always make sure that the information at any given moment is always in step with the times". In addition, in a message to booksellers, the publishers noted that this volume would bring the encyclopaedia "up to date" ("En prisregulering" 1931). Accompanied by a photograph of Adolf Hitler, one of the new biographical entries in the supplementary volume, the text claimed that *Aschehougs Konversations-Leksikon* would now be "*the most modern, most extensive and detailed, most complete and up-to-date encyclopedic work ever published in Norway*" ("Under pressen" 3.3.1931). The argument that the passing of time itself demanded new encyclopaedias or new editions of encyclopaedias is among the most frequently used claims in these marketing operations. In an advertising campaign for *Aschehougs Konversationsleksikon* in 1939, potential customers were told that

[p]eople of our time seem to have an increasing need for reference books of all kinds. This strong tendency must be explained from man's new sense that the whole world affects him personally. Distances are disappearing, and through film, the press and radio the common man is presented with a chaotic material of images, concepts and words ("Aschehoug 15-bind" 1939).

This notion that the particular form or quality of the age itself demanded such new knowledge products was further strengthened in the same encyclopaedia's 1955 campaign:

Time demands much of modern man, and his existence is becoming more and more complicated. Who? When? Where? Why? In this way questions arise many times a day through newspapers, broadcasting and literature. We now have the past, the present and the future thrust upon us in quite a different way from earlier generations. That is why keeping informed about the world has become a necessity of life for modern man, and the *Konversationslexikon* is no longer a luxury for the few ("Aschehoug konversationsleksikon 18 store bind" 1955).

Along with such extended appeals to the necessity of keeping up with the times as a requirement for existence in the modern world, Aschehoug coined slogan after slogan in order to convince its potential customers:

"The one who buys *Aschehougs konversationsleksikon* is safe!"

"The answer to all questions."

“Everything about everyone for every Norwegian home.”

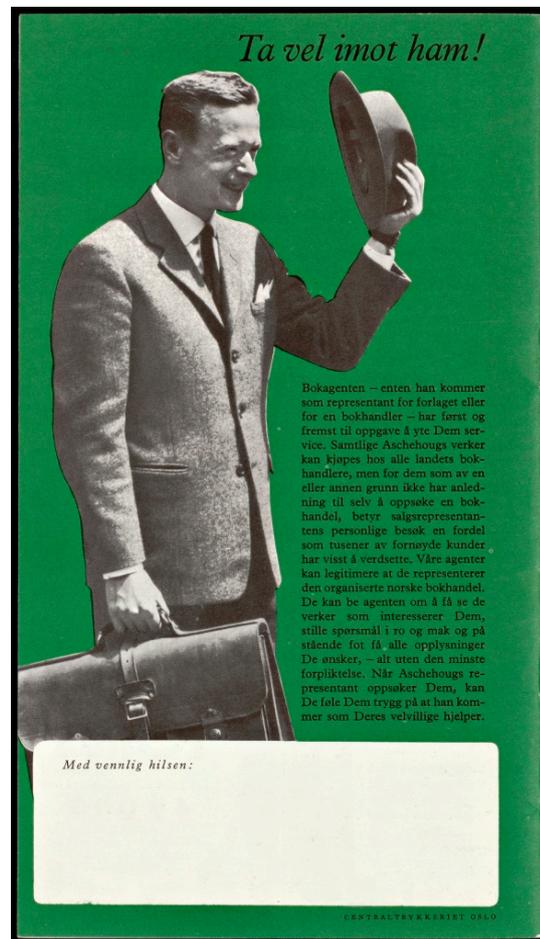
“Everything about everyone – for everyone – always at hand. New, useful and absolutely necessary!”

“First! Biggest! Leading!”(Aschehoug Konversasjonsleksikon, different pamphlets).

For the 1932 supplementary volume, the publishers informed booksellers that they had coined as many as 29 new slogans, one for every letter of the (Norwegian) alphabet. Such slogans were produced *en masse* throughout the century as part of ever larger and more sophisticated marketing campaigns. These one-liners made the case that the encyclopaedia in question was the most reliable, useful, extensive, simple, different, enlightening, illustrated and modern in the country.

Aschehoug’s main rival in the market, *Gyldendal Konversasjonsleksikon*, was first published in 12 volumes between 1933 and 1934. A main point in the early advertising campaigns was that this was a cheaper encyclopaedia than Aschehoug’s, and a more user friendly one. It was only in 1960 that Gyldendal really stepped up the competition against its main rival, however. When director Harald Grieg later described the project, *Gyldendals Store Konversasjonsleksikon* – the “great” or “big” had now been added in spite of the fact that the work was reduced to four volumes – he described the cost of seven million Norwegian kroner as “a colossal one-time investment” (Grieg 1971: 812; Tveterås 1996: 397). The marketing organization had been extended and professionalized, and around 40 sales representatives had been trained for the task of travelling the country in order to secure pre-publication orders (ill. 3). Two years later, the number of sales representatives had grown to 50. One of the selling points emphasized in Gyldendal’s multi-faceted marketing operations was the one of simultaneity.

Contrary to their main competitor Aschehoug, *Gyldendals Store Konversasjonsleksikon* published its four



Ill.3: “Treat him well!”. The professional salesman of Aschehoug’s encyclopaedia, at your service. Photographer unknown, no title, Aschehoug: 1960. Small print 26,4x15 cm.

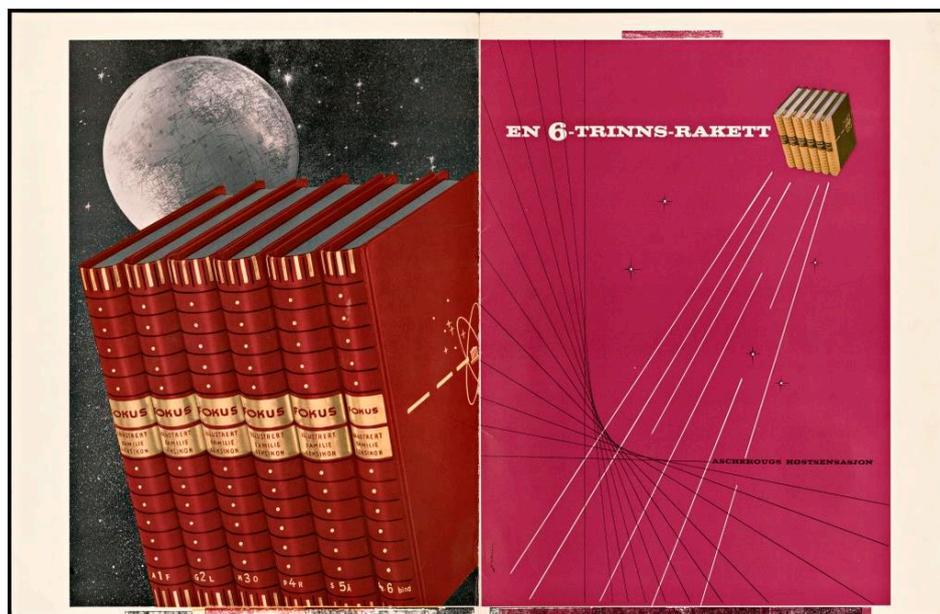
volumes at one and the same time. The customer would not have to wait for the later volumes, and, along the way, realize that the early volumes had become outdated. Here was, instead, instant access to a huge wealth of knowledge. The first print run ran to 32 000 sets with a total value of 24 million kroner, making up as much as 7 percent of the annual sales in the Norwegian book market. By this time, the competition for being the most modern and up-to-date reference work had intensified. When the single-volume edition of Gyldendal's encyclopaedia appeared, it was marketed under the slogan: "A new age needs a new encyclopaedia" (ill. 4).



Ill. 4: The answer to the demands of modern times: "A new age needs a new encyclopedia!". The single-volume encyclopaedia of Gyldendal was a huge success and sold more than 50,000 copies. EM (unidentified signature), no title, Gyldendal: 1948. Litography 99x70 cm.

Differentiations for the Market

Aschehoug's *FOKUS* encyclopaedia became perhaps the strongest example of a marketing operation placing its emphasis on the topos of the modern and up to date. This product of the late 1950s focused on speed and efficiency; it aimed to meet the needs of a modern reader caught in an age of rapid change. In launching their new encyclopaedia the publishers adopted terminology from the most advanced sectors of modern technology. The six-volume work was nothing less than "A 6-stage rocket!" ("En seks-trinns-rakett!" 1958) (Ill. 5). The slogans centered around the demands for reliability, plus immediately accessible knowledge: "No one can be without an encyclopaedia today"; "A thousand and one questions occur and demand answers in the ever-changing situations of everyday life"; "All you want to know about what is happening in our time"; "*FOKUS* – the reference work for all situations!"; "*FOKUS* – An encyclopaedia in line with the demands of the age"; and, going one step further, "*FOKUS* – for the future!" *FOKUS* was, furthermore, the "modern man's modern encyclopaedia" (*FOKUS*, different pamphlets). The colorful promotional brochure of 1958 also claimed that *FOKUS* was "more than a new encyclopaedia – it is an encyclopaedia in an entirely new fashion, first and foremost in the way in which it communicates knowledge" ("*FOKUS* – kunnskap på en ny måte!" 1958). Much emphasis was placed on the efficient communication of knowledge achieved through so-called "narrative pictures", and when one reviewer dubbed the encyclopaedia "The television of the book shelf", the publisher was able to make use of yet another marker of 20th-century modernity in its promotional material (ibid.).



Ill. 5: *Totally up to date: "A six-stage rocket!"* Unknown artist, *En 6-trinns-rakett*, Aschehoug: 1958. Small print, 50x35 cm.

In her book *Forbrukeragentene [Agents of Consumption]*, the historian Christine Myrvang argues that the conditions for what would evolve into the so-called *consumer society* in a Norwegian context were established in the transition between the 19th and 20th century (Myrvang 2009): in other words, just at the time when the first Norwegian encyclopaedia, *Aschehous*, was published. Myrvang describes how a variety of agents and institutions began to actively shape the market, and how they sought to remove “purchase resistance”, so that a wider population would want to purchase goods – even things you had not previously thought there was a need for, and far less an opportunity to acquire.⁴ Especially during the formative phase of the Norwegian consumer society, which mainly seems to have taken place between the years of 1914 and 1960, there were “various forms of knowledge exchange, where science, technology and expertise were used in the surveys of customers, and in advertising and sales operations and other promotional work” (Myrvang 2009: 13). To measure and map the consumer, various tools and techniques were developed and perfected. Targeted and specially designed advertising helped create new needs, and new market segments were identified and established (ill. 6).



Ill. 6: A new target group is singled out: the family. In the centre of the contemplative family is the father, holding the new product: an encyclopaedia described as “the fairytale of the real”.

Albert Jærn (1893-1949), *Familieboken*, Aschehoug: 1937. Offset, 99x69,5 cm.

Back to *PaxLeksikon*

As noted at the beginning, when it was launched, the 1970s radical *PaxLeksikon* presented itself as something new. Placing itself as a work in opposition to the standard *Konversationslexikon*, and in terms of content clearly giving an impression of being a counter-encyclopaedia, *PaxLeksikon* nevertheless performs particularly interesting cultural and political work, while not escaping, or even wanting to escape, the standard marketing operations we have described. While openly and obviously indebted to its radical predecessor *Arbeidernes Leksikon* [*The Workers' Encyclopaedia*], published between 1932 and 1936, *PaxLeksikon* could nevertheless plausibly claim that it was “unusual” and “the only one of its kind in Western Europe” (“Her er PaxLeksikon. Nyskrevet av folk som har preget samfunnsdebatten de siste 20 åra» 1978). Here was a distinct and conscious ideological profile, an encyclopaedia “in which the authors do not hide their opinions, but systematically try to enlighten things from a unified perspective” (ibid.).

For the radical intellectuals behind Pax, newness was not just about organization or content; it was about thinking anew as part of a necessary response to what they deemed to be a new phase of capitalism. But they also placed themselves in a tradition, one which bypassed the *Konversationslexikon*. In an ingenious interview with Denis Diderot in the promotional material for the first volume of *PaxLeksikon*, the great *encyclopediste* advised his young Norwegian successors to think new thoughts (Dagblaba 5.3.1979). But thinking anew, he noted, was not possible without an “overview of experience”, a key synthetic principle which of course informed the new encyclopaedia (ibid.).

Pax was, to repeat, different from the *Konversationslexikon* in a number of ways. This was proven by the rejection of objectivity, by the explicitly socialist, feminist and international perspectives, and the selection of entries. But in other ways it was very much similar to the encyclopaedias against which it so strongly distanced itself, such as in the organization of knowledge and the relatively distinguished material appearance of the books, as well as, and not least, in the stress on newness. This was, furthermore, representative of the degree of its market orientation, and the active efforts these publishers and idealists made in order to create and reach new customers.

By August 1978 the small publisher had more than 25 people employed in selling the work in the largest Norwegian cities, and commercial material was supposed to reach all of the country's 1.4 million homes (“Dagsorden/framdriftsgruppa” 14.6. [1978]). Those in charge believed that *PaxLeksikon* had an “enormous sales potential”, and the campaign would include “exhibitions, direct contact, phone calls, window exhibitions and DM [Direct Marketing] among other things” (ibid.). The country's booksellers were told that:

There is a big market for *PaxLeksikon*! Surveys undertaken by Pax show that a big public are waiting for *PaxLeksikon* with expectation and interest. Those that want *PaxLeksikon* are, admittedly, special groups – but these groups are big, they are tra-

ditional book buyers and they are spread all over the country. *It is all about reaching them!*. (“Her kommer PaxLeksikon, kampanjetidsplan” 1978)

As part of its innovative marketing, the publisher also made effective use of its own existing network. When volume three was published in October 1979, and the sales had proven themselves considerably lower than anticipated, the 4,300 people who had bought the encyclopaedia directly from the publishers were contacted and asked to do their part: “Now we must get to know your friends – and it is *you* who will have to make the contact!” (“Vervekampanje” 1979). In spite of all of these efforts, *PaxLeksikon* ended up as a commercial disappointment. In 1980, two years after the first volume had been published, the minutes from a meeting of the encyclopaedia’s editorial board opened as follows: “Sales stand almost entirely still” (“AML” 1980-01-10).

PaxLeksikon was not a great commercial success, but it functioned as a marker of identity for large parts of an entire generation. If you had *PaxLeksikon* on your bookshelf, you sent a signal to others about your view of the world. As a commodity, *PaxLeksikon*, furthermore, took part in a dynamic, in which commercial material and a sales apparatus helped build an encyclopaedia as a brand. Part of this construction meant that the encyclopaedia presented itself as something new, and that owning this product meant that you moved with the times, perhaps even ahead of them.

Going Online

The 20th-century print encyclopaedia seemed to gain momentum while creating an ever stronger sense of urgency, until it finally began to slow down toward the end of the century – in terms of sales, that is – and eventually disappear. The disappointment felt by the idealists behind *PaxLeksikon* may not have been related to the technological, structural, and economic difficulties to come, but their greatest rivals in the Norwegian encyclopaedia market would soon experience even more radical setbacks. In the era of online encyclopaedias, however, some of the issues we have discussed above remained, both in terms of their connections with the dynamics of the market, and their self-presentations.

A first definite ebb in this tide may be said to have come when Aschehoug and Gyldendal, the publishers with by far the biggest market shares, in 1987 decided to pool their resources together and launch *Store Norske Leksikon (SNL)* [*The Great Norwegian Encyclopaedia*]. This must be seen as the last concerted effort on behalf of the printed encyclopaedia in the marketplace. When the publishers decided to stop publishing *SNL* on paper 20 years later, in 2007, the argument was simply that there was no longer a market for such products. It also turned out that even the online version of the encyclopaedia was a product that seemed impossible to sell: the 140 000 users simply did not attract enough advertisers at the time. On February 25, 2009, it became available for free. At one point the owners of what had recently been such a valuable commodity even tried to give it to the

Norwegian state for free, in the hope that this rich knowledge resource would be maintained through public funding; the offer was promptly rejected by the then Norwegian Minister of Culture, Anniken Huitfeldt: “There are other, more important things to support than something neither users nor advertisers have shown an interest in,” she observed (*Morgenbladet* 12-18 March 2010). A heated debate soon ensued. One point of attack was the fact that the Minister of Culture seemed to say that economic support of non-profitable cultural initiatives should not be the task of the government. Critics responded sarcastically, as reported on NRK.no, asking what the task of the Ministry of Culture would be if not this (NRK.no 2010). Another key issue was Huitfeldt’s own understanding of knowledge, in which the matter of speed seemed to be central:

The Internet has revolutionized our chances of collecting and sharing information. While we in earlier times consulted encyclopaedias because they were our most accessible source, we now go straight to the source and our demands for updated information have increased in step with digital developments. (*Morgenbladet* 26 March-8; April 2010)

In other words, new knowledge for modern people, Huitfeldt seemed to insist, was already available – in *Wikipedia*.

The obvious counter-argument that was soon made was that *Wikipedia* was not an encyclopaedia written by a traditional academic group of editors, like the *SNL*. The Minister of Culture responded by stating that people should seek knowledge wherever they wanted to, and continued to note that the real challenge was to achieve a critical attitude to all sources of knowledge, expressing the somewhat commonsensical notion that academics in any case always disagree: “Claiming that you find truth in an encyclopaedia is problematic” (NRK.no 2010). Kjell Lars Berge, professor of rhetoric at the University of Oslo, gave a pithy summary of the minister’s argument: “Huitfeldt concluded that no one has a monopoly on truth and that it is therefore problematic for the state to support an encyclopaedia project. Such a view of knowledge is not just quasi-pragmatic, it is New Age-like and absolutely scandalous” (*Klassekampen* 24 March 2010).

At the end of 2010, the *Fritt Ord Foundation* and the savings bank foundation *Sparebankstiftelsen DNB* finally found a way in which to help secure the continued existence of *SNL* online. The *Fritt Ord Foundation* allocated 16 million NOK for a period of three years, with an intention to achieve more long-term funding and to form a permanent organization. At record speed, *SNL* managed to establish a highly operative and well-used online encyclopaedia, relying on the traditional practice of an editing board and named – rather than anonymous – authors for the articles. But *SNL* still depended entirely on external financial support to secure its continued existence.

With a head start of six years on the first digital version of the old *SNL*, Norwegian *Wikipedia* had established its position as the first encyclopedic port of call for Norwegian internet users. As a part of the Wikimedia Foundation Organiza-

tion, *Norwegian Wikipedia* also had a technological and economic lead, from the outset benefiting from their shared publishing platform, and from the financial support of 60 million NOK from private benefactors. The Arts Council of Norway have by now even given 530 000 NOK for the development of both *SNL* and *Wikipedia*, having shown a particular interest in training writers in how to write *Wikipedia* articles (Arts Council Norway 2014).

Norwegian Wikipedia is one of oldest *Wikipedia* versions, established as the 16th to be created since 2001, when the *Wikipedia* project was founded. The Norwegian project was inactive for a substantial period of time, however, until it was revived in the autumn of 2003. In 2004, a separate version for the minority language New Norwegian (*nynorsk*) was created, and this was launched in 2005. Since that time, two Norwegian *Wikipedia* versions have therefore existed side by side.

As of 2012, *SNL* had more than one million users each month. The vice-chancellor of the University of Oslo, Ole Petter Ottersen, board member and active supporter of the non-commercial *SNL*, has referred to a new and strong enthusiasm for submitting articles to *SNL* among his employees (Aftenposten 20 March 2012). This interest goes hand in hand with the new editorial policy of *SNL*, where speed and the need to update have become highly important factors. Chief editor Anne Marit Godal has noted how there is now a new pressure on old-style encyclopaedias:

It affects our legitimacy if a particular subject is dead. Our readers notice when a particular article was last updated and whether there has been an active discussion. [...] You are supposed to be able to see whether a Professor emeritus has in fact been involved in the discussion. Earlier it was possible to hide behind a CV-based authority. But what gives legitimacy on the web is *action*. We will always want to get rid of editors who don't respond or who use more than three days to respond and thus demonstrate their presence. (ibid.)

At this point, however, Godal is not overly worried about the competition between *SNL* and *Wikipedia*:

We can live very well with *Wikipedia*. We want to be the primary source for updated, academic knowledge, while they are a secondary source. We have the responsibility of a publisher, while they need sources in order to publish things (ibid.)

Godal stresses the need for *both* a Norwegian *Wikipedia* and an encyclopaedia of the *SNL* kind, where all contributors write under their full names and the quality is vouched for by Norwegian experts in their fields.

A Question of Trustworthiness

It is still necessary for encyclopaedias to attract financial support from external sources, but now that the market of paying customers has collapsed in Norway, in new ways. Interestingly, the arguments for gaining such support now seem to fol-

low the lines of a more traditional legitimization of knowledge. The issue of trustworthiness has been a pillar in the production of encyclopaedias for centuries, and has been a “unique selling point” (Sundin & Haider 2013: 2).

At the moment of our writing, the continued existence of *SNL* is being challenged more directly by *Norwegian Wikipedia*. When the new conservative government presented their budget for culture in November 2013, they included a grant of five million NOK to online encyclopaedias, a move clearly intended to secure the existence of *SNL*. But Erlend Bjørntvedt, second in command at Wikimedia Norway, soon confirmed that they also wanted to apply for this funding (Morgenbladet 15-21 November 2013). Anne Marit Godal from *SNL* noted, “There’s a crisis because we’re out of money by The New Year”, sarcastically adding that if they don’t get the support, they will have to move back to selling paper encyclopaedias and knocking on doors (Ibid.).

The lines of argument have clearly shifted, however. The guidelines for funding have not yet been finalized, but the press release from the Ministry of Culture “recognizes the need to increase the diversity of scholarly edited and high-quality online encyclopaedias” (Ibid.).⁵ The bone of contention in the resulting debate is the definition of “scholarly edited” [“fagredigert”]. Godal finds that the wording excludes *Wikipedia*, as it breaks with their fundamental idea of a democratic and open editorial practice, but Bjørntvedt does not accept the argument. He even finds it “very difficult to understand” what is meant by the term (Ibid.). In *Morgenbladet*, he points to the fact that a *Google* search typically results in very few hits in Norwegian, most of which are associated with *SNL*. In what may or may not be a tone of mock-naivety, he warned that *Wikipedia* will react if applicants will be asked to fulfil criteria that do not exist in the language. While *SNL* hopes that the Ministry will demand that such “scholarly edited” encyclopaedias must operate with authors credited by name, Bjørntvedt somewhat audaciously claimed that he is in fact involved in the only properly quality-controlled encyclopedic online project in Norway: “All changes must be approved by another person besides the one writing them”, he noted, whereas this is not the case with *SNL* (Ibid.).⁶ In other words, the battle seems to focus on scholarly authority rather than on speed or democratization.

Conclusions

As we have shown in this article, some of the most striking aspects of the marketing strategies for the print encyclopaedia were the prominence of claims to modernity and to continually bringing the readers up-to-date on the world. In online encyclopaedias, this old encyclopedic challenge has been solved by new and more efficient means of being up-to-date. The legitimizing strategies for funding the production of this recent encyclopedic knowledge seem to re-activate and strengthen another old generic topos, namely that of trustworthiness. Rather than

framing knowledge within political terms, in the way that the counter-encyclopaedia *PaxLeksikon* did, both *Wikipedia* and *SNL* are grounded in framing themselves as fundamentally democratic, even if both editorial practices and their respective views on the role of expertise are markedly different. This leaves online encyclopaedias in a position where the main question concerns trust.

Ours is not a comprehensive study, but we have chosen to follow some of the most significant examples of the Norwegian encyclopedic genre over the course of a century all the way up until what may seem like its exit from the marketplace. It is hard to think of another product in the Norwegian book trade of the 20th century, with as much investment in marketing efforts as the encyclopaedia. As such, in the way in which some of the most ambitious products become laboratories for market innovation, the genre can also be seen as a motor in the general professionalisation and commercialisation of the publishing trade.

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Notes

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- ² For two other pioneering studies in this field, one concerned with the materiality of the book, the other with the history of reading and the distribution of texts, see D.F. McKenzie, 'The Book as an Expressive Form' and Roger Chartier, 'Labourers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader', in *The Book History Reader*, ed. by David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery.
- ³ These collections are particularly comprehensive in this case because such material has been included among the mandatory submissions to the national deposit library.
- ⁴ For further reading on the emergence of a consumer society, see Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement*; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005*; and Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*.
- ⁵ The Norwegian terms are 'fagredigert' and 'faglig kvalitetssikrede'.
- ⁶ It should perhaps be noted that this is not the case. Articles in *SNL* are first vetted by an internal editor, then by the editor responsible for the subject area.

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